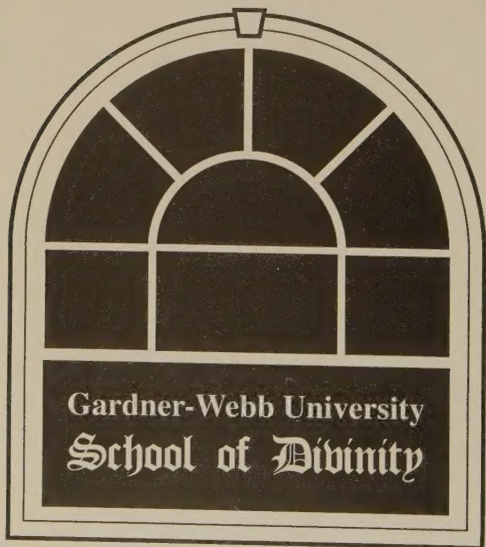


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JOB

by JAMES McKECHNIE

JOB

MORAL HERO, RELIGIOUS EGOIST
AND MYSTIC

BY

JAMES McKECHNIE

Author of

"INTERPRETATION OF THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT," etc.

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Job
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I: INTRODUCTION

I

INTRODUCTION

THE Book of Job is the classic of human misery, the voice that bewails "the burden of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." As truthfully revealing the thoughts of one sufferer it makes appeal to all sufferers. And the appeal is in proportion to one's acquaintance with suffering. Deep calls unto deep; when sorrow speaks only her initiates understand. None save those steeped in the tears and tragedy of things, none save those who have wrestled in spirit with the Unseen Powers, can read the Book of Job with sympathetic insight. But such men, qualified by suffering, enter into the thoughts of the great sufferer, making his groans and wrestlings their own.

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The Book deals not with the mystery of suffering but—and the distinction is important—with the mystery of a soul under suffering. The problem comes before us in concrete form; we study it through the passionate thoughts, the spiritual conflicts, of a much afflicted man. If the work is to be called drama at all, it is, in quite unique sense, the drama of a soul. Every drama necessarily contains some measure of soul-stuff, but the feature of this drama is that it contains no other stuff. In the body of the work, and after the initial series of calamities, nothing happens, or needs to happen. Withdrawn from the play and bustle of outward events, the drama achieves unique spiritual independence. It works itself out, with swift and passionate movements, in the soul of a man.

The Book impresses us first with the splendour of its poetry; perhaps in the end what equally impresses us is its truthfulness. Not, needless to say, truthfulness in the sense that it records the actual words of Job, for

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Luther was right when he said, "Job spake not in that sort as in the Book is written." When, however, he adds, "It is not easy, if possible, in tribulation and temptation to speak after that manner," one is led to say it is just in tribulation and temptation a man would "speak after that manner," if such gift of speech were his. He cannot keep to the cold inadequacies of prose; if incapable of poetry he has recourse to groans, sighs, curses—which things are inarticulate poetry. To make Job speak in the language of poetry is in no way to misrepresent his thoughts; it is, on the contrary, to give them their only full and fitting presentation. Realism passes into poetry and poetry into realism, and the one loses nothing of itself in becoming the other.

What we get from the Book of Job are not second thoughts on life, but thoughts that flash from direct contact with life. In that respect it differs markedly from *Hamlet*, a drama with which it has many points of comparison. *Hamlet* is always one remove from

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the immediacy of experience. You catch him not in the receptive, but in the reflective stage, not browsing on, but chewing the cud of bitterness. Job lacks Hamlet's speculative imagination. He is not given to curious excursions of thought. Such excursions as he makes, he is goaded into by the immediate goad of experience. It is this immediacy which constitutes the terrible strength of the Book. It also constitutes its difficulty. The sequences of the Book, while true to psychology—being indeed the sequences of living thought—do not lend themselves to concise and orderly presentation. If such presentation is to be possible the various and conflicting strands of thought must, to some extent, be isolated for treatment. They must be considered separately, though in Job's actual experience they were seldom altogether separate. That, so far as necessary, is the method followed in these pages.

Many scholars are of opinion that the speech of Elihu formed no part of the orig-

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inal text of the Book. If that opinion is well founded, it can be said that the Book is not didactic. It teaches, indeed, but only in the broad and balanced sense that all human experience is bound to teach. A special pleader for no truth, it merely gives us—within its own inevitable and artistic limits—a picture of reality, enforcing for didactic purposes no particular aspect of that reality, but presenting all with the sweep, the freedom, the impartiality of nature itself. Truth conveyed in this fashion may readily fail to be perceived; but when it is perceived, it comes home with the convincing power of the universe behind it.

In respect to a book of this quality, exposition necessarily means limitation. The expositor who preserves a resolute silence in regard to much, is merely making a virtue of necessity; the virtue will be in evidence if the little that can be said is of vital and central significance.

However many a man's joys or sorrows may be, they tend to gather themselves into,

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and to express themselves through, one crowning joy or sorrow. Aaron's rod, swallowing up the other rods, is an emblem of the human heart. In person and estate, Job was one vast kingdom of woe. But the king of that kingdom, the crowned agony that gathered all into itself, was a spiritual terror—the sense of alienation from God. The alienation, at its worst, was never complete and never acquiesced in. Had it been, Job would have been spared those inward warrings and contradictions which formed the spiritual element of his sufferings. Like Prometheus chained to the rock, his proud task would simply have been to suffer and defy. As it was, alienation from God meant alienation from himself. He was a bewildered, passion-tossed man, his moods tumbling tumultuously on the top of each other, his heart the battleground of faith and doubt, submission and rebellion.

“To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.”

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Job knew that madness. He was a worshipper, and yet a rebel; with his tongue hurling reproaches at, and with his heart crying out for, the living God. Timid scribes of former times and timid commentators of to-day have sought to tone down the violence of Job's language that he might escape the charge of irreverence. But he himself admitted the irreverence. The cry which came from him after his vision of God can only be interpreted as an admission that his attitude to God had been lacking in reverence. In so far as submission is an essential part of reverence, he assuredly was lacking. But let the other side of the account be considered. In defying, not lightly, but with a vast terror in his heart, the false god of might, he gave heroic worship to the true God of right. He stood up for the moral idea, and if the moral idea is not greater than God, it is because the moral idea is God. If it was Job's mistake to dissociate them, it was his glory to let God in the splendour of His omnipotence go, and to cling to the

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moral idea. That, though it expressed itself as defiance, was true reverence.

Job had to simmer some little time in his trouble before his spiritual ferment began. At first he could say:

“What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not also receive evil?”

But good and evil “at the hand of God” are not on the same footing that the one should be counted as reasonable and as much to be expected as the other. Happiness does not constitute a problem. When Job was happy he did not demand to know what he had done to deserve happiness. But misery came, and his soul was up in arms tearing at the Heavens with question and complaint. Job’s saying is to be counted jaunty rather than great. It was uttered before he had digested his own experience.

Without suffering, destiny would contain no articulate problem. There would be no contradictions to reconcile and no depths to fathom. A sea of bliss would be like the

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"Dead Sea" to the spirit of man; he would float on the surface, but could not dive or explore. But while man is a metaphysician by nature, he is made a theologian by suffering. Suffering drives him beyond the vague wonder and awe of the metaphysician. It urges him to seek intelligible and personal relations with the Unseen, to question and petition the Eternal Mystery. It makes him a religious man, necessarily also a theologian. Suffering indeed, using the word in its broadest sense, lies at the root of all theology. All makers of religion have been "men of sorrows and acquainted with grief." All creative voices have been voices crying from out the depths. Job's was such a voice, the most wrestingly and passionately human of them all. It is thus that in him we catch a glimpse of that wonderful process—theology in the making. Judged by its contents his is a meagre theology. Bed-rock truths, the naked simplicity of great intuitions, are all that constitute it. In the strictest sense it is *theologia pectoris*, the hidden treasures of the

heart unlocked and made available by a great experience. That gives it its interest and value.

One notes, and is perhaps puzzled to note, that however triumphantly luminous Job's intuitions might for the moment be, they did not always abide with or take commanding grip of himself. They tempered and disturbed his inherited convictions, but did not themselves readily become convictions. Job was slow to grasp the value of his own inspirations. The light shone in darkness, but the darkness, comprehending it not, remained darkness, albeit pregnant and expectant darkness, to the end. It was no bad sign, perhaps rather a good sign, that Job's splendid resilience of faith was almost to the last matched by a persistent recurrence of doubt. Faith, untroubled by doubt, is not necessarily strong faith; indeed when doubt sleeps it is frequently a sign that faith is asleep also. Indifference rather than faith is immune from the wrestlings of doubt.

Job never broke altogether free from in-

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herited beliefs, the shackles of his own past. But—and this was in some respects a greater triumph—he moved, dragging his shackles after him. Intellectual clearness he could not attain unto. Every effort he made in that direction seemed but to plunge him into confusion and contradiction. But better than solving his doubts, he rose superior to them; better than dispelling the darkness, he attained unto a faith which made the darkness seem friendly.

II: THE ACCUSER

II

THE ACCUSER

SELDOM can imagination take its boldest flights without giving indication of being abashed at its own boldness. But in the Prologue to the Book of Job there is no indication. The poet's imagination is childlike in its freedom from self-consciousness. It invades the council chambers of Heaven, it reports debate in the secret places of the Most High, and yet we feel that here are boldness without presumption and humour without levity. Humour assuredly, grave, restrained, yet of most daring quality there is. Satan confronts the glory of the Presence unabashed, for he carries his blindness before him as a shield. Blind and arrogant in blindness is Satan, flouting the deluded ones who affect to see. How can the Lord be so mistaken

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Charge,

as to believe in, nay, boast of the blameless virtue of His "servant Job"? Job's virtue is merely enlightened selfishness. He serves because he finds it pays. The moment he found it did not pay he would renounce the service, nay, he would turn round and "curse God to his face." And this, if given a free hand in his dealings with Job, Satan undertakes to prove.

But he needs God's permission before he can undertake the proof. Not a hand can he lay on Job till permission is granted. On God then rests the responsibility for the sufferings of life, and to human thought it is an appalling responsibility even for God to carry. The Book deals with the matter not as a problem to be solved, but as a mystery to be pondered over. To attack it as a problem is to be baffled; to ponder over it as a mystery is to gain insight into the deep things and great things of life. The darkness indeed remains, and nothing can dispel it, but many—and those best qualified to speak

—declare they can detect a glory smouldering at the core of the darkness.

While Satan needs God's permission to afflict men, he needs none to accuse them. As accuser he is in the freedom of his own blindness, and submits to no control. Blind spirit though he is, Satan has his own range and quality of vision—how otherwise could he be a genuine devil? Everything in life is visible to him save the truth, beauty, and goodness which give life meaning and value.

The Bush he sees perchance can even count the number of its leaves; 'tis only to God burning in the midst of the Bush he is blind. No nobility, no poetry, no glint of glory in all the universe for Satan. Call not this most low grade of spirits a fallen son of the Highest. What drop of the blood royal of the universe can run in such muddy veins? The Satan of *Paradise Lost*, that dark, dilapidated glory, that tarnished splendour of spirithood, has seen better days, but never has the Satan of Job been other than what he is, the most prosaic, most disqualified of

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spirits. Think not to fathom the mystery of his origin; it is one with the mystery of life itself. Though not created by God, he springs into being at every creation of God. He is the nobody's child of the universe, born of necessity itself. And of necessity he endures. God may continually defeat, but cannot destroy him. He may continually turn the bitter water into sweet, but the fountain of bitterness He cannot dry up. Not till the dewdrop falls into the ocean, or rather—since such may be the miracle of spirithood—not till the dewdrop so expands as itself to become the ocean, will Satan cease to be.

The Lord is very ambitious for His servant Job. Already has Job proved himself a "perfect" man, so far as prosperity can develop perfection. But he has not acquired nor has he had the opportunity of acquiring that fuller perfection which comes through the discipline of adversity. The Lord—daring in wisdom—resolves to give him the opportunity. He accepts on his behalf the

sneering challenge of Satan. "Doth Job serve God for nought?" As yet there is no answer. Job, it is true, has hitherto served without giving a thought to wages. But may that not be because he has had no occasion? Wages, in the form of abundant prosperity, have never failed him. What if now they were to fail? What if he were actually asked to serve for nought? Would he be willing to do so? There is no answer. Life will reveal the answer by creating it. For life's tests are creative tests. They bring character into evidence by bringing it into being. Take note, therefore, of the purpose of the Lord, for surely it is to make Job a better man, and not merely, as some imagine, to demonstrate that he is already a good one. Were His purpose other or less than that, Job would be the victim of injustice, the *corpus vile* of a cruel, because unfruitful and unnecessary, experiment. But the Lord is the Creator; in His dealings with the soul of man His purposes are never less than creative.

And, as standing in the way of His purposes, the happiness of Job is ruthlessly sacrificed, treated as a thing of no account. Satan is free to heap horrors on him, to make of him what miracle of misery he likes. Short of taking Job's life, no curb is put on his monstrous ministrations. This is the core of mystery, the central darkness of life; the light of reason, bring it here to bear as we may, serves little other purpose than to make the darkness visible. One thing only need be said. If tribulation is needed to discipline man into perfection, it must, as in the case of Job, be personal tribulation. There is no going to school by proxy. The educative power of suffering is only for the sufferer. To see others under the lash may be to learn little; to have one's own back afflicted is to be in the way of learning.

But what of the hazard to the soul of Job? Satan's buffetings may make him a worse rather than a better man. It is a hazard that must be faced. The fire may spoil the potter's clay, but until it endures the fire of

what use to the potter is the clay? There is no certainty that Job will be made "perfect through suffering," but if further perfection is to come, in that way only can it come. The Lord, daring in wisdom, accepts the hazard on Job's behalf.

In his days of unbroken prosperity, Job had doubtless some fair-weather devil—say the Mephistopheles of Goethe's Faust—busy about him, tempting him. Mephistopheles is an angler for the souls of men, and the malicious patience of his angling is more to be dreaded than the "frightfulness" of Satan. Since Job has had strength to resist Mephistopheles, there is hope that he will not be subdued by Satan. Since prosperity has not lured him to forget, there is hope that adversity will not drive him to reject God. But there is real hazard in the Ordeal.

The hazard becomes speedily apparent. Far from being the meek and patient sufferer of traditional belief, Job proves an exasperated and rebellious man, almost as much so as Satan could wish. But behold and wonder

at the miracle of spiritual arithmetic. Satan has many successes to his credit, yet, when added together, the sum total is seen to be failure. It is not enough to say that he loses in spite of his gains—that does not express the full irony of his position—for, indeed, he loses by and through his gains. He makes Job a rebel, and in rebellion Job lays grip on a deeper loyalty. He provokes him into complaints against God, yet these complaints mark not renunciation of, but agonising struggles after God. He makes him a heretic, a passionate repudiator of the faith of his people, yet even while the old faith is being destroyed, a new and nobler faith is taking root in his heart. Satan is thus, in most unforeseeable fashion, duped by his own activities. Yet if, after our facile manner, we sum up the results of Job's Ordeal by saying that good comes out of evil, let us beware in what sense we use the words. Never by way of natural and necessary sequence does good come out of evil. It is as a glad surprise, a miracle and triumph of

grace, that it comes. Satan accomplishes nothing for God, though God may accomplish much through Satan.

While God and Satan are the real protagonists of the drama, yet—for such is the law of spiritual battle—they remain behind the scenes, and what we witness is the soul of Job torn asunder and at war with itself. The drama is entirely and intensely human.

III: THE COUNSELLORS

III

THE COUNSELLORS

I

WHEN a man has wedded his soul unto misery he counts it disloyalty to his bride to accept consolation. But Job was not in that condition. His unsparing honesty with himself made him indeed fastidious with respect to the nature of the comfort offered him. He was not the man to gulp down soothing syrup and call it comfort. Yet far from steeling his heart against the visitations of hope, it was hope he sought and passionately desired. There was much pride in him; but none of that black pride which makes a mock at comfort.

Yet his friends failed to comfort him, and we need not wonder. Almost the most delicate and difficult relation in which man

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can attempt to stand to man is that of comforter. Success in such a task implies special excellence of character; but failure need imply no special defect. If there is little to praise in these men, neither—apart from their theology—is there much to blame. They meant well and, to begin with at least, felt friendly towards Job. But friendship between men of mature years is apt to be a habit rather than a passion. The magic of love is seldom in it. Love is the chameleon of the spiritual world; so responsive to the core of its being that, while abiding in its eternal sameness, it adapts itself to every change of condition. These men's stolid friendship moved in ruts from which love alone could rescue it, and they had no love. Hence their inability to adapt themselves to the new position created by Job's change of fortune; every effort they made to reach an understanding serving but to aggravate the misunderstanding.

The man who lacks sympathy—the clairvoyance of love—cannot be your comforter,

but may readily be your tormentor. Should he, as often happens, be afflicted with an itching sense of duty, your tormentor he assuredly will be. He will stand to you in that most irritating of all relations, the relation of meddlesome aloofness, and verily you will be plagued. No folly can be so aggravating as misplaced wisdom. It puts you in the intolerable position that you cannot deny what is said without appearing to deny the truth, or show resentment against the speaker without apparently putting yourself in the wrong. So it happened with Job. His friends seldom said a foolish thing, almost as seldom a wise thing, which untimeliness did not turn into folly.

Eliphaz the Temanite is justly counted the most considerate of the three friends. But do not even his opening words strike the wrong note?

“Behold thou hast instructed many,
And thou hast strengthened the weak hands;
Thy words have upholden him that was falling,

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And thou hast confirmed the feeble knees.
But now it has come to thee, and thou faintest;
It toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."

If, as we must assume, the intention was to recall Job to his strength rather than to reproach him for his weakness, surely the words were unfortunate. They imply an aloofness, a lack of sensibility on the part of Eliphaz, which promised little for his success as comforter. He was genuinely surprised at the change which trouble had wrought on Job. It was beyond his power to understand why the once mild and companionable man should now be a volcano vomiting forth bitterness and rebellion. Clearly Eliphaz reasoned in a vacuum, judged human nature without taking human nature into account. Job horrified rather than interested him. His failure to understand the man was so complete that he did not see anything requiring to be understood.

It is among the ironies of life that men like Eliphaz are the first to offer themselves as

soul-physicians to the afflicted. They have cartloads of wholesome advice to bestow, and who but the afflicted are their lawful dumping ground? It is always permissible to take liberties with misery. Advice may be the frankest form of friendship; but when pressed on the unfortunate it may be the most offensive form of patronage. It is offered on the assumption that a man, just because he is unfortunate, must be on a lower moral or intellectual plane than his prosperous adviser. As applied to Job the assumption was peculiarly ungenerous. He was no stranger to those men. They were aware that, far from being an ignorant man, he was no whit behind them, perhaps rather in advance of them, in all that was counted knowledge. In his prosperous days it would never have occurred to them to treat him as an unenlightened man, requiring to be instructed in the rudiments of religious truth. But it is always permissible to take liberties with misery. Job was no longer great, therefore he need no longer be counted enlight-

ened. His wisdom had vanished with his prosperity. How these men took advantage of their position! How they dinned rudimentary counsel into the ears of the man at whose feet they had once been willing to sit! They meant no unkindness, and all the worse that they meant none. Insensibility may be worse than sin. Better than no conscience is a conscience which, though it fails to keep you right, can at least notify you when you are wrong. If these men did not knowingly sin against Job it was because their dull, unsympathetic egoism put them below the level of knowledge.

Had Job accepted their ministrations in a becomingly submissive and grateful spirit, they would doubtless, so far as their sense of duty permitted, have dealt gently with him to the last. But Job proved anything but submissive. He refused to stand to them in the relation of moral or intellectual inferiority.

“I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.”

His temper, fretted as it was by pain, could not endure their pompous airs. He retaliated fiercely, flung words at them like stones. "Wretched comforters," "useless physicians," "forgers of lies"—these were among his taunts. The men, conscious of their own good intentions, naturally thought Job was treating them very badly. They took sore offence, and the offence carried them into regions of uncharity. It will be sufficient again to refer to Eliphaz the Temanite.

In his first speech Eliphaz treats Job with much consideration. Could tact take the place of sympathy it would be an altogether admirable speech. But while tact can keep you from saying the wrong thing only genius—for sympathy is the root of genius—can enable you to flash forth the right thing. Still Eliphaz is very considerate. His sense of duty compels him to remind Job that he is a sinner in God's sight. But how tactfully, how inoffensively he discharges his duty:

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"Shall mortal man be more just than God?
Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?
Behold he putteth no trust in his servants,
And his angels he chargeth with folly,
How much more them that dwell in houses of
clay?"

No accusing finger is pointed at Job. The accusation is against the human race in general. Job may be no worse than others; but as a man he must be sinful, and therefore deserving of punishment. The whole speech is similar in character. It lacks the higher qualities of warmth, spontaneity, sympathy; but so far as tact can make it excellent, it is indeed excellent.

2 sp. In the second speech, while making no attempt to conceal his displeasure, Eliphaz keeps himself well under control. He has no wish, and alas, no need to condemn Job. Job by his ungoverned tongue is condemning himself:

"Thine own mouth condemneth thee and not I:
Yea thine own lips testify against thee."

But what a change the third speech reveals. Gentleness, justice, tact—all that formerly distinguished Eliphaz—are suddenly abandoned:

“Is not thy wickedness great?
And thine iniquities endless?
For thou hast taken pledges of thy brother for nought,
And stripped the naked of their clothing.
Thou hast not given water unto the weary to drink,
And thou hast withholden bread from the hungry.”

We need not accuse Eliphaz of inventing these charges. Probably he was merely repeating what he had heard—the malicious clatter of the hour. Such clatter there was sure to be. Now that Job was down, base folk were sure to be down on him. It is ever the case that when Fortune, the idol of the multitude, falls from its pedestal, the first to kick it are its own worshippers. The time was when Eliphaz would not have believed evil stories of Job, and even now

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he believes them only to the extent that he wills to believe them. Job has wounded his pride, stung him with taunt and sarcasm, and the aforetime fair-minded Eliphaz, looking through the atmosphere of his own grievances, discovers that Job's "wickedness is great" and his "iniquities endless." Thus the man who began by seeking victory for truth ends by seeking base victory for himself.

II

But these men's attitude to Job was determined less by their personal character than by their theology. As men their conduct, though petty, was yet understandably human; as theologians, it verged on the inhuman. Why, from beginning to end of the debate, did they never utter one word of frank sympathy for Job? To his pathetic cry:

"Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends;

For the hand of God hath touched me,"

why did they give no response? Had they said they pitied him it would not have been profoundly true; but neither could it have been wholly false. And what though it had? In a world where lies float on every wind, and are made to serve every interest, is there to be no little lie in the interest of charity? A loving lie stains no man's conscience; not at least when offered as medicine to the afflicted. So unnatural was those men's conduct that we are bound to suspect something lay behind it. Can it be that a secret terror put restraint on their tongue? Job appealed to their pity on the ground that the hand of God had touched him; may the ground of his appeal not have been the reason for their refusal? Was it for them, they may have argued, to pity the man whom God was punishing; to justify the man whom He was condemning? That would be to take sides with man against God—a terrible thing, likely to cause the divine wrath under which Job was suffering to flash forth against them also. The ugly

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truth seems to be that sycophantish fear, masquerading under the garb of conscience, suppressed the instincts of these men's hearts.

||| They were afraid to pity Job lest they might anger God.

Yet the theology which led to this unnatural error was not in itself grossly false. It was untrue chiefly in the sense that it was a too narrow statement of truth. All human affairs, they said, are in the hands of God. Poverty and riches, prosperity and adversity are of His appointing. And since it would be impious to think of Him as other than just, since indeed His justice is axiomatic, it follows that He apportions each man's lot according to his deserts. There could therefore be no doubt as to Job's guilt. The fact that he was a sufferer was in itself proof that he was a sinner. If they had no other proof, neither did they need any.

their
eology

It not unfrequently happens that the passion for clearness and consistency can only be gratified at the expense of essential truth. Something of chaos seems to cling round all

reality, round at least such of our thoughts as most closely approximate to reality. Our biggest truths are never our tidiest, most logic-groomed ones. Those men's theology, viewed merely as a scheme of thought, was admirably clear and consistent. But there its merits ended. It was flouted by the mystery it professed to explain; it contradicted rather than interpreted the facts of life. Whatever may be the relation between the material and the spiritual—man's destiny and his deserts—it is assuredly not a relation which permits of being fully expressed in terms of rewards and punishments. And to serve the purposes of justice it need not be. The spiritual has its own tribunal. Its rewards and punishments are within itself. It indeed overflows, for good or evil, into the material; but the law of its overflow is complex and puzzling. The retributive justice which we find in nature cannot be said to take account of guilt as guilt. If we suffer under it, we suffer not because we are guilty, but because we happen to be in a

position which lays us open to suffering. It may be through no action of ours that we are in that position; or, if through our action, it may be through a good and praiseworthy one. It does not in the least matter. Enough that we are out of harmony with the nature of things—that is all the law takes account of.

And were it otherwise—were the moral government of the universe what these men conceived it to be—would it not be open to the quite fatal objection that under it there would be no moral universe to govern? The battle of morality, to be genuine, must be fought on a non-moral arena. If virtue had sure and speedy reward, how could it be said of any man that he served God for nought? The opportunity would be gone, and with the opportunity the glory. A universe apparently indifferent to the struggles of a good man constitutes a problem; a friendly and favouring universe would indeed abolish the problem, but somewhat

after the manner in which death abolishes disease.

And yet, since God is in all things, so of necessity must His justice be. But to make justice a mere matter of rewards and punishments is to detach from the spiritual totality in which alone it exists. There are no separate or separable attributes in spirithood. The one is in the all and the all in the one. God's justice is His love, His wisdom, His Godhood in action. It is the justice of a father treating you according to your needs, not of a judge treating you according to your deserts. There is really no other justice. I am acting justly towards you, not when I reward you for this action and punish you for that, but when I do my best for you, whatever in the light of your true welfare that best may be. Not till we take this view shall we be able to believe that divine justice is at work in the laws and happenings of life. It will be a matter of faith even then, but of faith which, while transcend-

ing, does not contradict the teachings of experience.

Theories preserve an attitude of questioning humility to the facts of life; dogmas are lordly things, dictating to rather than accepting the guidance of fact. These men's dogmatic conception of divine justice was in no danger of being disproved by facts. When collision arose, the facts rather than the conception had to give way. Not that they denied the facts. So long as they were free to misconstrue and misinterpret, what need was there to deny? Wicked men, they frankly admitted, were quite often happy and fortunate in their lot. But that was because God was preparing for them a greater destruction.

"Sorrow's crown of sorrow
Is remembering happier things."

Wicked men were put on a pinnacle of prosperity on purpose that their fall when it came, and it was sure to come, might be the worse. For the mystery of a good man in

affliction they had a still more expeditious solution. It was simply to deny the man's goodness. He was living in secret sin, and God had found him out though man could not. Why explain things when they could thus explain them away? Why make theory fit fact when fact could so easily be made to fit theory? These men, we may be sure, were conscious to no disloyalty to truth. On the contrary, on the strange yet not infrequently acted on principle that the more unbelievable a thing is the more credit there is in believing it, they probably prided themselves on their unflinching loyalty. Dogmatic debaters, monuments of lifeless consistency, unfit to give light, equally unfit to receive it—no wonder they wearied Job, for indeed they weary us. A lesser writer, dreading such dullness of reiteration, might have been tempted to seek variety at the expense of psychological accuracy. As the debate proceeded the men might have been made, if not to modify their position, at least to exhibit some versatility of thought in its

defence. But here was a writer who dared to be dull when the truth demanded dullness. Reiteration unto weariness was characteristic of these men, therefore reiteration unto weariness there must be.

To enslave the mind is necessarily to pervert the heart. Nature had not endowed these men with rich sympathies; but what little they had their theology stifled. They took God's part in the spirit of partisans, and thus, in attempting to justify His ways, they cruelly perverted their own. Nature, when left to herself, imposes limits alike to the good and the evil in man. It is religion, the mother of extremes, which enables him to achieve miracles, whether of love or cruelty. But why blacken the sacred name of religion? The crimes done in her name come not of her but of bigotry, Satan's perversion of religion. Bigotry is blind, stubborn, and knows no mercy. Passion or self-interest may make a man fitfully cruel; bigotry alone can make him methodically, unselfishly, gratuitously cruel. Satan secures

his best workers under false pretences; never do men serve him so heroically as when under the belief that they are doing God service. It was with a clear conscience, nay, it was to keep a clear conscience, that these men refused Job the sympathy he craved. They thought they were worshippers, but in truth they were merely sycophants of the Almighty; and that, judged by its effects on character, may be the worst of all sycophancies.

III

When Timon of Athens discovered the baseness of his friend he tore the idea of friendship from his heart. Mankind became loathsome to him; he cultivated scorn of them as a virtue. Job endured his disillusionment in nobler fashion. False pride, had he possessed it, might have taught him to conceal his wound. It might have made him meet the coldness of his friends with a show of scornful indifference. But that would have been affectation, and it was Job's greatness

that he had no affectation, that the grand simplicity of his nature was stained by no touch of insincerity. Far from affecting a self-sufficiency which he did not feel, he passionately begged for sympathy. His anger at his friends' coldness expresses the measure of his craving for their love. Had he missed them less keenly he would have treated them more gently.

It says much for the wholesomeness of his nature that disillusionment had no power to pervert his social instincts. They remained sweet and sensitive to the last. That is shown by the manner in which he valued his good name. His character, when vindicated, must be vindicated before men. Nothing less could meet the ends of justice, and nothing less could satisfy the heart of Job. To attach such weight to the good opinion of one's fellows, though not in itself a weakness, may easily lead to weakness. It tempts a man to give his conscience into the keeping of the multitude, and thus let his character, which is the substance, slip from him in an

effort to grasp reputation, which is the shadow. Here also Job stands blameless. His nature was rock-like in its strength; no sort of pandering would he stoop to. He was not too proud to be one of God's mendicants, openly begging for love; but to truckle for it, to part with self-respect for it Job would not.

At an inopportune season for himself did he discover the coldness and distrust of his friends. Just when he needed to be strong, the discovery must have robbed him of some portion of his strength. The love and esteem of his fellows would have meant much for him in his spiritual conflict. Had he found justice on earth it would have been easier for him to believe in the justice of Heaven. Had men shown themselves friendly he could the more readily have believed in the friendship of God. But it was his destiny to be disarmed by men, so far as they could disarm him, before he entered on his conflict with God. His isolation was complete. No one believed in him; no one pitied him. Not

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on earth nor in Heaven had he a friend. Few men come to such a full-faced interview with their own loneliness, and well for them that they do not. That is the Medusa which none save the choicest spirits can look upon and live. Job staggered under his tremendous destiny. His faith, his patience, his sanity itself seemed at times on the point of giving way. But always the native resources of his spirit came to the rescue, and in the end he emerged, a battle-scarred but triumphant soul, into a region of peace.

Tri. || In another respect these men must have done something, and may have done much to aggravate Job's Ordeal. They had no patience with him when he protested his innocence. Guilty he must be since God was punishing him; doubly guilty he was making himself by rebelling against his punishment. No hope for him while he remained in that spirit. But if he would confess his sin and submissively accept his punishment there was hope—since God was very merciful—that he might be forgiven and restored

to favour. These were the "consolations of God" which the friends pressed on him. But why, when they saw his state of mind, did they persist in pressing? Right relations to God, as to man, imply many things, but surely the basic thing is honesty. There may be hypocrisy in confessing sin, just as truly as there is in denying it; and of the two hypocrisies that of easy, matter-of-course confession may be the worse. We may all be "miserable sinners," but until we think so we ought not to say so even before God. It was wrong to urge Job to confess a guilt he did not feel; it was wrong to press him to acknowledge the justice of God's dealings when his heart cried out against their injustice. The effect on him must have been altogether bad. When a man is accused of sins which he has not committed he is apt, in healthy resentment, to forget those he has committed. His sense of innocence does not confine itself to the charges in hand. It indignantly, triumphantly suffuses his entire consciousness. If that was so with Job—

and no more except a man have been it—
 was partly due to the ill-advised promises
 of his friends. And that part of our
 shallow experience and comprehension, they
 should have attempted to measure to the
 troubled end of Job. What they understood
 well they were understood of the troubled
 one, was that he was the most miserable of
 men, crushed under every conceivable calamity.
 And when they told him the loss of his
 goods, the affliction of his pain, the loss of
 his friends might be expected, they thought
 they were fully answering his cry, and that
 exactly the right comfort and counsel. They
 did not see that what troubled Job, was
 not the loss of his property, was the
 loss of his God. They did not understand
 that when he believed, his joyful trust in
 the righteousness of God, could be restored,
 no other calamity would count. They did
 not understand, because their standard of
 experience made understanding impossible.
 Job's religious education they could give
 him no longer. It was ending in

them that he was battling bravely with his doubts. Why should he have doubts? They had none and if he were a good man neither would he. When a man imagines he must be strong in the faith because he is untroubled with doubts, you have reason to suspect that he is a shallow religionist. When, in addition, you find him, in the full confidence of ignorance, prescribing for the spiritual troubles of his fellows, you may be sure that he is shallow, and arrogant in shallowness. By these marks Job's friends stand condemned.

Advocati diaboli the men assuredly were, the more effectively so that they believed themselves to be *Advocati Dei*. They were necessary to Satan's plan of campaign. His part was merely to shower horrors on Job; their part was to give such a spiritual interpretation to these horrors as threatened to destroy his faith. The irony of their position was that everything they did led to results diametrically opposite to what they intended. They tried to reconcile Job to God,

and increased his alienation. They tried to convince him of divine justice, and embittered his sense of injustice. They offered him what they called the "consolations of God," and aggravated his spiritual anguish. What curse was upon them that they were thus mocked and thwarted by their own activities? Even the curse that was upon Satan himself. The men were blind.

IV: THE SUFFERER

IV

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I

IN his *Grace Abounding* Bunyan gives a strikingly sincere and intimate revelation of a soul struggling through an intense spiritual crisis. In that respect it is inferior to no book save the Book of Job. Despite their obvious differences the books have much in common, and are fitted to cast a helpful light on each other.

If the saying, "Genius is to madness close allied," is true at all, it is especially true of religious genius. Throughout his long spiritual conflict Bunyan's mind was unbalanced—nobly, savingly unbalanced if you will, but none the less unbalanced. No one can read his *Grace Abounding* without noting how subject he was to vivid visitations and upheavings of thought, and how

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completely he lay at their mercy. They were irresistible. They rushed upon him like armed men; he staggered under the sudden force of their impact. The "subliminal self" is one of those words which we use to cover our ignorance; but since nothing better is available, may we not say that Bunyan was in that passionate, overwrought state of mind which seems to facilitate passage from the subliminal to the conscious self? As sparks from a fire, so from that great deep, that laboratory of spirithood, did thoughts unaccountably rush into and possess his mind. So with Job. At no time throughout his Ordeal was his mind normal. It worked at fever heat; tumult and exaggeration were in the working. The religious problem seized upon him with masterful force, working itself out vitally, experimentally, and at the expense of wrestlings unspeakable. His soul was the battleground of unseen powers; until the battle was fought out he was doomed to be tortured, torn asunder by inward antagonisms—faith and

doubt, hope and despair holding alternate sway. With respect to their psychology Bunyan and Job were remarkably alike.

One conviction common to both was the conviction that they were the special objects of divine displeasure. It was an obsession with them. Bunyan complained that the wrath of God against him was such that the universe with all its forces was armed against him. "Methought," he said, "as if the sun did grudge to give light, and as if the very stones in the streets did band themselves together against me; methought they all combined together to banish me out of the world, that I was abhorred of them, unfit to dwell among them, because I had sinned." Again he said, "I lay trembling under the mighty hand of God, continually torn and rent by the thunderbolts of his justice." Job expresses his sense of divine displeasure in, if possible, even more forcible language:

"He hath flung me down,
He hath gnashed upon me with his teeth."

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"I was happy when he took and shattered me,
Grasped me by the neck and dashed me to pieces."

Such expressions, if used to describe the experiences of ordinary men, would with justice be considered greatly exaggerated. But as used by Job and Bunyan there was no exaggeration. For, while genius does not necessarily imply that its possessor is more massive or subtle of thought than ordinary men, it invariably implies that he is more intense. The man of genius is an intensified man; you know him not by the range, but by the keenness of his mental experiences. That has to be kept in mind when reading the vehement language of Job.

Though these men were alike obsessed by the awful sense of alienation from God, their religious problems were entirely different. For, while Bunyan blamed himself for this alienation, Job, though sorely bewildered, could not refrain from blaming God. It was not any doubt as to divine justice, it was the awful certainty of it which terrified Bunyan.

God's perfection made him afraid. "The glory of the holiness of God," he said, "did break me in pieces." He acknowledged he deserved God's wrath and curse on account of his sin. Job made no such acknowledgment. His belief in his own innocence was absolute. Nothing could exceed the tenacity with which he clung to it, the challenging boldness with which he proclaimed it. It was not a self-righteous belief; he held it, as will be seen, at the price of great pain to himself. Yet hold it he did in opposition not to man only, but, as he thought, to God Himself. God was judging him guilty, but not even God must be allowed to coerce the conscience of man. Job feared God with an exceeding great fear; but in this matter he stood out against Him. With a magnificent courage, a courage that makes a sublimity even of error, he cried:

"He will slay me, I wait for him:

Yet will I maintain my ways before him."

If he yielded, if he ceased to maintain his ways before Him, there might even yet be

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hope that God would not slay him. So his friends told him, and probably he more than half believed them. But Job was the least bribable of men. Not even to secure the favour of God would he be false to himself.

It is no paradox but sober truth to say that he suffered the agonies of a good conscience. In certain circumstances these agonies may be very real. Sometimes it is a comfort to a man, the only comfort his position admits of, when he is able to blame himself. Bitter as is the pain of self-reproach, it may be nothing to the pain we feel when compelled to cast reproach on one we love. That was Job's position—the dilemma in which his good conscience involved him. In justifying him it condemned his Maker. Why have these horrors been heaped on him? Why among all the sons of men is he the most miserable, his name a byword for misery? Nothing save the blackest guilt could merit such punishment, and Job cannot accuse himself of any guilt. Can it be that the Lord is not a righteous

God? Can it be that man may suffer injustice at the hands of his Maker? The question with all its horrors forced itself on the broken and bewildered man. And he had nothing wherewith to mitigate its horrors. Such concepts as chance, laws of nature, secondary causes—concepts by which we screen ourselves in thought from the naked flash of omnipotence—were foreign to Job's scheme of thought. To him God's government was immediate, God's responsibility absolute. Who then save God could be the author of the cruel injustice under which he was suffering? The thought plunged his soul into darkness and turmoil unspeakable. Not with his intellect only or chiefly, but with his whole passionate, agonised being he wrestled with it through his long night of wrestling. To estimate his misery—if, indeed, estimate be possible—stress must be laid on the fact that Job always has been and still is an intensely religious man. The religious instinct, the urgency of faith has suffered no abatement; it still works as hun-

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ger in his soul. But, alas, it has lost its objective, has nothing now on which to spend itself. The need to love and trust has become an unsatisfied need—who is there now to love and trust? Job's inward devastation is as complete as his outward. He is a religious man bereft of his religion—and that is the deepest of agonies. Bunyan knew no such agony. Bunyan had merely lost the favour of God; Job had lost God himself. Bunyan could kiss the rod that chastened, and worship the God that frowned; but to Job crying the awful cry:

“It is God that hath wronged me,”

it seems the collapse of all things. His is a tortured soul, a soul that cannot rest because of its own exceeding pain. There are lashings out of agony, tumblings of mood on the top of mood, impetuous movements of thought like the dartings of a caged animal seeking escape and liberty. Job's misery is indeed very great.

The old relation of love and trust in which

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he stood to God being gone, another relation inevitably comes into prominence—the stark relation of strength to weakness. That is an accursed relation, hateful and the source of hatred. It is sweet to know myself as clay in the hands of the Potter, when I love and trust the Potter; when I don't, it is bitterness and rebellion. Behold the bitterness and rebellion of Job.

II

Woe alike to the strong and the weak, when they stand to each other in no better relation than that of strength to weakness. Men learn to hate those whom they hurt, and that is the penalty the strong pay for their oppression. As for the weak, there is danger that they will be poisoned by the sense of their own weakness. Symptoms of the poison are not lacking in Job. He dwells too much, and in the wrong manner, on God's omnipotence and his own feebleness. It is not a thought which leads

to humility. Man is humbled by his littleness only when he beholds it in the light of his greatness. Under other light self-abasement comes of it, and at the core of self-abasement there is pride.

“What is man that so great thou dost count him?”

The question shows Job to be conscious of his littleness, but the context makes it clear that he is anything but humbly conscious. He does not claim—as he would were he humble—those rights which pertain to him in virtue of his weakness. He does not ask for help, protection, mercy—the things which it becomes the strong to give, and the weak to receive. Shutting himself up in his own insignificance—a resentful and embittered man—he asked simply to be left alone. Therein we detect that perverted pride which ever goes hand in hand with self-abasement.

There is more of this in the Book than is generally perceived. It will be enough to give another instance. Weak folk grow bit-

terly merry, wax vainglorious in weakness, when excessive power is used in the crushing of them. Could it be in other than a taunting spirit that Job asked:

"Am I a sea-monster that thou settest a watch over me?"

In the Babylonish myth here clearly referred to, the sea-monster, storm-god, and maker of confusion is represented as fighting for the mastery of the universe with the God of light. The God of light conquers indeed, but with enough to do. The sea-monster proves not far from his match. In savage banter Job affects to wonder whether, by any chance, God mistakes him for that sea-monster. If not, why this perpetual watch, these enormous efforts to subdue him? What an amazing spectacle—man jibing the God before whom he trembles, man entrenching himself in his weakness, that from it, as from a citadel, he may hurl taunts at omnipotence! Mad as the contradiction is, in the heart of man such contradictions may

be. Self-abasement has always pride at its core; and misery, when overdone, bursts into mad merriment at itself. The deepest humour is tragic humour.

Clearly the belief that he was the helpless victim of capricious injustice worked as poison in the soul of Job. Not a sweet thought came to him while that belief possessed him—thoughts only of bitterness and rebellion. And who shall say Job was wrong? If it is the false god of might one has to deal with, is not rebellion better than cringing? He who cringes hates himself for cringing, and of necessity hates also the Being before whom he cringes. By rebellion Job preserved his soul alive, and made return to sweetness possible.

Even so, he exhibits overmuch bitterness. Natural as it is for weakness to think ungenerous thoughts, it is hard to make allowance for certain of Job's thoughts. But let it be remembered that in its judgments the heart moves towards extremes, that when it ceases to idealise upwards it almost in-

variably begins to idealise downwards. Now that Job no longer believes all good of God, he is driven by the logic of the heart to imagine much evil. Witness his strangely jaundiced attitude towards his own happy past. While admitting that he had been favoured and protected, that blessings had been showered on him in abundance, he declares that God had never meant truly well by him. Even when sending good, He was designing and preparing evil:

"These things thou didst hide in thine heart."

"These things"—these horrors—God had been "hiding in His heart," biding His time to pour them on Job. From the beginning there had been malevolence in His kindness. A terrible thought that; happily also nothing more than a passing thought uttered in the madness of misery. The sweet springs of gratitude would have been poisoned at the fountain head, the good in Job would have been turned into evil, had he read his life experience with such a jaundiced eye. Well,

indeed, for him that the thought took no lodgment in his mind, merely flitting through it as bird flits through the air, leaving no track or trace behind.

Still the fact that such a thought could even occur to him shows that Job is not the man he was. His Ordeal is telling terribly on him, and he knows it:

“God hath weakened my heart,
And Almighty confounded me clean:
I am utterly lost in the darkness,
And gloom wrappeth my face.”
(*Dr. McFadyen's Translation.*)

So completely has Job been stripped of every vestige of well-being that only one more loss is possible—the loss of himself. That is what now threatens him. He is conscious that the citadel of his soul is broken into, that self-possession, confidence, and clearness of thought are leaving him. And they are leaving him just at the point where it is necessary he should retain them. Though still resolutely sure of his own integrity, clouds are gathering round the as-

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surance. Could he defend himself, could he establish his innocence if called on to do so? Alas, so confused is he, so "utterly lost in the darkness," he feels he could not.

"Though I be righteous, mine own mouth shall condemn me ;

Though I be perfect, it shall prove me perverse."

Job's belief in his own integrity is far from being a source of unmingled comfort. It brings him agony as well as joy, perhaps more agony than joy—but what of that? It is all that is left to him, all that enables him to bear up against the persecution of God and the injustice of men. Take that away and he would be an utterly broken and defenceless man. And God is intent on taking it away. God is invading, carrying confusion into the soul of Job. Ah, how the man fears, worse than fears, the spiritual might of God! A maddening thought, a thought that mocks at reverence is at work in his heart. He looks at God through the thick fog of his own inward confusion, and be-

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hold his soul is blasted by an insane sight. On the throne of the universe sits an omnipotent and irresponsible casuist, a Being inscrutable in wisdom, using His wisdom not for the upholding of justice and judgment, but for the confusion of moral distinctions, making good appear evil and evil good. All creatures are the playthings of omnipotent caprice, none more cruelly so than Job himself. What avails it that he is an innocent man? Might he not as well be guilty, since he is made to suffer the full ignominy and penalty of guilt?

"I know that thou wilt not hold me guiltless.

I then am infallibly guilty;

So why should I labour in vain?

For though I wash me with snow,

And cleanse my hands with lye,

Thou wouldst plunge me in the mire,

So that mine own clothes should abhor me."

(Dr. McFadyen's Translation.)

Job has not at any time served God with deliberate eye to his own advantage, yet he has always believed—held it as the surest

of truths—that the service was to his advantage. It is a terrible thing, it shatters his conception of the moral universe to have to admit the contrary. But there's no resisting the evidence of facts. Though he were the worst sinner on earth he could not be more miserable, more outcast of God and man than he is. He has been labouring in vain; he has been serving God for nought. And were he, if that were possible, to serve still more faithfully, it would not make the smallest difference. Arbitrary omnipotence has decreed his lot, and do what he may, the decree shall stand. Such is the conviction to which Job is driven.

Satan's buffetings of Job have been monstrous. He has stripped him to the bone of every vestige of well-being, made of him a very miracle of misery. And all to bring Job to his present state of mind, all to convince him that it does not pay to serve God, that neither in respect of outward prosperity nor inward peace has the righteous man any advantage over the wicked. Now that Job

is convinced, Satan feels sure of victory. No longer will the Lord have occasion to boast of the disinterested virtue of His servant Job. Job, who has always been a hireling at heart, is about to come out in his true colours. No more religion, no more pretence at religion for him. And as for righteousness, what motive can he now have for leading a righteous life? Henceforward he will do just what he pleases, just what suits his own purposes; the question as to whether it is right or wrong will give him no concern.

To the question of the Ordeal, thus terribly forced on him, what is to be Job's answer? Not the base answer Satan expects, nor yet an altogether right answer. In his present state of mind, out of tune as he is with the universe, it cannot be altogether right. But if Job must be called selfish, Satan completely mistakes the quality of his selfishness. He thinks it must take a mercenary form, subversive of Job's integrity, whereas it takes an exactly opposite form.

Job is put mightily on his mettle, made resolute not to sink but to soar. The right wings for that purpose, the wings of faith and love, not being available, he makes shift to soar on the wings of pride. They are but leaden wings; they cannot lift him to the heights, but prove happily sufficient to keep him from floundering in the mire. God is not doing the right thing by Job; but Job proudly declares he will do the right thing by himself.

"My righteousness I hold fast and will not let go;
My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."

Noble though the resolution is, let there be limits to our admiration. Job's determination to serve without wages must not be taken to mean that his claim for wages is abandoned. On the contrary, the man is nursing a grievance, piling up debt in his heart against the Almighty. A moral hero we must grant him to be, but a grumbling and disconsolate hero; resolute, but not yet free and disinterested in the service of virtue.

But faithful servants are not far from sonship. Already there are signs that Job is escaping into freedom. As the Ordeal advances his complaints are losing, to some extent, their narrowly personal character. The cry, "Why am I not getting justice?" is giving place to that other, less self-centred cry, "Why is the order of the universe unjust?" By that sign we know that Job is progressing towards freedom. But he is not yet free.

But if the spirit of the hireling still works in him, why—now that he believes it can bring him no advantage—does he persist in clinging to his virtue? Why, it may rather be asked, should he not persist? The man is "rooted and grounded in virtue"; virtue is the noble habit of his soul, surely it is natural that, even in this crisis, he should cling to his virtue. And it is not all a matter of habit. Motives also are at work; if they are mixed motives, with some none too noble elements in the mixture, it is what we might expect. Strong men are seldom strong in

virtue purely of the good that is in them. Saintship, like gold, needs the stiffening of an alloy to fit it for the current uses of life; and Job's saintship, if you count him saint, is assuredly not lacking in alloy.

The belief that you are an ill-used man, the victim of injustice, seldom of itself breeds bitterness in your heart. You know that in the rough and tumble of competitive life injustice is unavoidable, that all men suffer from it more or less. It is part of the day's experience, and you take it as such. Not so, however, if the wrong you suffer is at the hands of one you love. It matters little how slight the wrong may be if done you by a loved one, you are cut to the heart, you suffer exquisite torture. Yet, strangely enough, you brood over, revel in that torture as if it brought you pleasure. And it does bring you pleasure. It is among the paradoxes of human nature that out of the sorest pain the heart can experience—the pain of a love that is outraged, a friendship that is betrayed—man by the unholy al-

chemy of his egoism can extract a perverted but very real pleasure. The record suggests that Job is no stranger to that pleasure. He harps on the enmity of God towards himself in such a manner as to make one suspect that the bitter-sweetness of the thought provides a fat feast for his egoism. It pains him exceedingly that God—the God whom he had loved and served so faithfully—should turn against him and treat him cruelly; and, just because it pains him, his egoism broods with unwholesome pleasure over the thought.

Nor does he confine himself to brooding. His sense of injury finds a more wholesome, though seemingly less saintly outlet in what must be called defiance. No fault need be found. So utterly alone is he, so unbefriended of God and man, that if he is not to break down, what can he do but stand defiantly up? Either cringing or challenge, either abject weakness or unlovely strength for Job. He appears to vacillate somewhat between them; but for the most part he

chooses strength—and that was the best his appalling destiny made possible.

Job is saturated with egoism, and well for him that he is. What other source of strength, what other support of virtue can he have save defiant egoism? He is standing at bay, defending his integrity against the universe. There is black conspiracy against him. God and man are combining to treat him as vile. But vile they cannot, shall not make him.

“My righteousness I hold fast and will not let go.”

It cannot be doubted that in Job's breast the love of self mingles subtly with the love of righteousness, that his determination to do nothing wrong means, nothing to put himself in the wrong. The egoism is not unworthy, nor, as contributing to his strength, is it inopportune. Even in the case of good men principle fights best when it calls pride to its aid, for then strength is steeled into stubbornness. Stubbornness may not be a saintly

quality; but scarcely can the world's warrior saints afford to be without it.

But Job's position, though little blameworthy in itself, is beset with spiritual peril. For warrior and saint, however they be combined in one person, really belong to different realms and are subject to quite different laws. The warrior may be proud, and none the worse a warrior; but pride in the saint is death to his saintship. There is danger that Job may say in his heart, "I, I only am righteous," and so fall completely from his saintship. There is peril in his nobility, peril in the splendour of his lonely loyalty to the moral idea. Not for long can he endure the weight of such splendour without injury to his soul. So far his sense of isolation has left his nature mainly unspoiled. Neither self-righteous pride nor undue bitterness has eaten deeply into his heart. But if he is not to become their ultimate prey, it is absolutely necessary that he should be restored to the community of life. His soul cannot be a healthy soul, nor can his virtue be lovable

till he can again clasp God and man by the hand. And religion alone can enable him to do that. It may not be so with every man, but with Job it is so. Nothing can be right with him, there can be no sweetness even in his virtue till religion supplies the sweetness. A moral man he may be, but a good man in the full sense of the word he cannot be until restored to his religion.

Alas that his religion, which alone can help him, should itself stand in sore need of help! If we judged by the sound and fury of Satan's assault we would say that the Ordeal has done much greater damage to it than to his morality. His morality has in a sense suffered no damage. It has merely been somewhat unduly braced, made too much a thing of defiance; while as for his religion, it seems to be shattered, well-nigh destroyed, by the terrible things he has come through. But matters are not nearly so bad as they appear. Apart, indeed, from the agony they bring Job, they are scarcely to be called bad at all. The man's faith has been terribly

shaken; but no part of it worth preserving
has been destroyed. None of his doubts
 have passed into fixed infidelities. He has
 thought much evil of God; but strictly speak-
 ing he has believed none. He has reasoned
himself into the belief that the Ruler of the
universe is unjust; but invariably he has
ended in doubting his own reasoning.
 There's no denying that, as a religious man,
 Job shows up somewhat badly under pres-
 sure of suffering, that in particular his at-
 titude to God reveals itself as more or less
 seriously wrong. But what if it never was
 right? What if the Ordeal has not so much
 injured his religion as brought to light cer-
 tain things which always injured it? That
 seems to be the case. Job has all along,
 though quite unknown to himself, suffered
 under a spiritual malady. There has been
 something wrong with his love for God. It
 has been the love of a religious egoist; of one
who imagined he stood in some peculiarly
close relation to God. Once he believed it
to be a relation of special favour, and soon as

that belief ceased to be possible, he declared it to be one of special enmity. Love of this quality is little more than an inflaming of one's egoism in relation to the person beloved. There is nothing divine, nothing liberating in it. Not of it can we say:

"Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all
the chords with might;

Smote the chord of self that, trembling, passed
in music out of sight."

Job's love for God has not disentangled him from the meshes of selfhood, and by that it stands condemned. Religious egoism, the subtlest of all forms of egoism, is working him immeasurable harm. Its distorting shadow, cast athwart the throne of the Eternal, may be said to be the real cause of his soul's agony. But it is not a new malady. Without suspecting or being suspected of it, he has all along suffered under it. The Ordeal has done nothing more than bring it to a head. The chronic has become acute; the symptoms have come to the surface; the mal-

ady is seen for what it is. That simply means that Job's religion is being sifted, that its weak spots, its unworthy elements are being found out. There is hope that what sifts may also purify, that what reveals the disease may pave the way towards a cure. It is a hope founded on experience. The effect of suffering, as experience reveals it, is twofold. It is that which, by directing a man's attention towards himself, inflames his egoism; and that also which, when its work is complete, thoroughly purges him of egoism. The most self-centred and the least self-centred men are alike great sufferers.

Hard as in some respects Job finds it to retain his religion, not for a moment does he think of abandoning it. To "curse God and die" is not in all his thoughts. His controversy with the Almighty really springs from a passionate desire for complete reconciliation. He doubts, because it is a necessity of his nature that he should fully and vitally believe. His doubts, in fact, are but the struggles of his faith to find a *modus vivendi*

for itself. It is in the light of that thought that his spiritual conflicts are to be considered.

III

The world is morally chaotic, burdened and tortured by innumerable wrongs; the justice of God is not in it. As an honest man, it is impossible for Job to resist that conclusion; as a religious man, it is impossible for him to rest in it. He takes the bewildering problem to his heart, wrestling with it in a long agony of wrestling. One day a thought occurred to him which, though rejected at the moment, was destined to influence him greatly. What, he asked himself, if a dead man were to live again? What if one could look forward to another life in which the wrongs of this present life could be righted? The mystery of God's dealings would not then be solved, but—and this would be a great matter—the way would be left open for solution. If Job could believe that man was

of value in the sight of God, that through "desire for the works of his hands" God would preserve man in being, and extend His care towards him after death, then Job would be content to wait, yea, "all the days of his appointed time would he wait till his change came."

For a brief moment he permits himself to revel in the pleasant thought, and then—almost as if angry at his own weakness—he casts it abruptly from him and plunges back into the bitterness of reality. That is what might have been expected. The wish to believe was there; but the wish cannot father the thought unless there is an environment to mother it, and here there was no environment. His countrymen took little interest in the question of a future life—so little that it scarcely presented itself to their minds as a question. They had, indeed, a vague belief in some sort of survival. Dead folk, they imagined, still retained the semblance, but little more than the semblance of life. It was life emptied of all content, life so shad-

owy and tenuous as to be incapable of bearing any burden of experience. Neither joys nor sorrows, neither good hap nor evil hap came to those beyond the tomb. Life of this quality naturally counted for little in their thoughts—so little that it did not even provoke speculation. Job's escape—in so far as he ultimately did escape—from the spiritual inertia of his age was not due to intellectual strength. His independence of thought, while great, was rooted in moral rather than intellectual strength. He had no speculative gifts, no beliefs in advance of his age save such as were forced on him by the moral demands of his nature. How compelling these demands must have been to enable that unenterprising though heroic soul ultimately to triumph in the manner he did over the stifling spirit of his age! It is an amazing triumph. The man breaks clean away from his moorings of conservative belief; he goes forth a lonely thought-voyager into sheol, that land of shadows beyond the

grave, to return in due time proclaiming a wonder:

"I know that my redeemer liveth,
 And that he shall stand up at last upon the earth;
 And after my skin hath been destroyed,
 Yet from my flesh shall I see God;
 Whom I shall see for myself,
 And mine own eyes shall behold him, and not
 another."

The significance of this great utterance is apt to be misunderstood. Job is not, as many imagine, declaring his belief in a resurrection, as we understand the word. Something much less, yet, in relation to his own needs, much more impressive is what he is declaring. It is belief in what may be called an *ad hoc* resurrection, a miracle to be brought about expressly for the purpose of his own vindication. Far from standing in its own strength, the belief is merely a corollary, and a burdensome corollary, to his faith in the triumph of justice. That his faith can carry such a burden testifies, as almost nothing else could, to its invincible strength.

Things are not going to come right, justice is not going to be done him in this life. He is to die in his misery, to go down to the grave misrepresented, misunderstood, bearing a name of ignominy. But that will not be the end. At some time, possibly long after worms have destroyed his body, he will be called from the grave expressly to witness his own justification. With his own eyes he will see, with his own ears he will hear his champion, his redeemer, God Himself, do him justice. It will be an unheard-of miracle, it will involve bursting the bonds of *sheol*; but any miracle is believable sooner than that black miracle—the eternal defeat of justice. That surely is Job's *tour de force* of faith.

In every respect it is a wonderful achievement, nor does its doctrinal meagreness lessen the wonder. The debt which the world owes to pioneers in any realm of thought is not to be measured by the extent to which they advance. They may take but one step; but that, as being the first, is the inspired

step. To follow it up and better it may be an easy matter; ordinary men may do that. But always the first step is an achievement demanding the daring and originality of genius. If Job here shows little speculative genius, he assuredly shows a high order of religious genius. Speculative genius wanders far afield in search of truth; religious genius bides at home, keeping open door for the visitations, the oftentimes painful visitations of truth. Plato reasoned himself into belief in a future life; Job agonised himself into it. Plato could give grounds for the faith that was in him; Job, beyond his conviction that justice must finally prevail, could give none. Yet Job's faith was more vital, more dearly bought than Plato's.

And that his faith is given no intellectual setting, that it is indeterminate in form and meagre in substance may be considered to add to rather than take from its impressive and convincing power. Systematic theology is always suspect. One feels that the system takes more or less toll of the truth; that the

truth, if not actually sacrificed, is at least trimmed and coloured in its interests. Job's theology cannot be suspected of such tinkering. We have it as wrung directly from his heart by bitter experience. Life had sifted him with a great sifting. Everything in him that could be shaken was shaken, that the "things which could not be shaken might remain"—ay, not remain only but stand forth in their stark strength as the pillars of his being. The greatness of Job, as a thinker, is that his thoughts came to him as the gift of necessity.

"When I am weak, then am I strong."

Job's *tour de force* of faith illustrates the truth of that profound saying. No *tour de force* would there have been had all been well with his faith. Had he found God amid the obscurities and entanglements of this life he would have given no thought to another life. The moral necessity which prompted him to do so would not have arisen. Paradox therefore though it is, the

weakness of his faith has led to this supreme display of strength. Well for him that the weakness of his *seeing* faith adds to the earnestness of his *seeking* faith. Well for him that though he cannot find the just and merciful God amidst the moral chaos of the present world, he seeks, and continues with the whole passionate strength of his being to seek. Behold the manner of his further search.

IV

Though Job cannot reconcile the facts of life with a righteous overruling Providence, he does not assert that reconciliation is impossible. He is disposed to blame his own ignorance, to believe that if he understood the ways of the Almighty he would acknowledge their justice. It is enlightenment, it is knowledge he needs. Behold the childlike simplicity, the daring directness with which he seeks it:

“Surely I would speak with the Almighty,
And I desire to reason with God.”

His friends have no light to give, no comfort to impart. It is useless to reason with them. Ah, that God would take their place, that it were permissible to reason with, come to explanations with the Almighty. And why should it not be? These men have been speaking foolishly for God; why should God not speak for Himself? They have failed to justify the ways of God to man; why should God not intervene to justify His own ways? A conference with his Maker is what Job desires. In whatever form he pictures it to himself—and on that nothing can be said—it is to be a real conference, as real as the one he is having with his friends.

There are emergencies when man makes his needs the measure of the possible, and when, though he may say he does not believe in, he yet instinctively looks for miracles. Job seems to be in that condition. One cannot, indeed, always be sure of the exact significance of his passionate monologues. In some of them he may be merely rehearsing what he would say should an in-

terview be granted him; in others he seems to imagine he is actually speaking with the Almighty, holding debate with God. With what direct and passionate boldness he conducts the debate!

// "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me."

is the burden of his cry. It may be right that he should suffer, but it cannot be right that he should suffer without knowing why he suffers. He wants an explanation, claims it as his due; and until he gets it he cannot acknowledge the justice of God.

If this is counted challenge rather than prayer, kicking rather than knocking at the door of grace—what then? "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by storm." At God's door earnestness is etiquette. To be overbold is better than to be overcautious. Life has lessons for the overbold; but by excess of caution man may cheat himself of wisdom. Stress is to be laid on Job's earnestness rather than on his error; yet surely his error is great.

Better, more grateful to the feeble vision of man the sun wrestling through and making magic sport with the clouds than the naked noonday glitter of a cloudless sky. There are certain questions which must, by their very nature, remain open questions if the pathway of life is itself to remain open. Light sufficient to dispel all doubts would, of necessity, prove a blinding light to the doubter. Job forgets that wisdom; the passionate urgency of his nature makes him forget. With that daring directness which marks his character he asks God to become His own apologist, to give account of His ways and doings to man. It is in the interests of faith that he asks. Things have got to such a pass with him, his destiny has become so unliveably dark that nothing can give him back his faith save knowledge. If he is to believe in the justice, he must be permitted to share in the council of his Maker. He asks the impossible. Nothing may be too great for God to give; but many things are too great for man to receive.

This passionately vocal man crying, clamouring for a vocal God—behold him rebuked by the silence of Eternity. The stars are silent above him, the graves are silent beneath him; there is no voice save the voice of the silence. And he hears not the voice; deafened by the clamour of his own heart, how can he hear? To him it is an empty silence, the silence of the void:

“Behold I cry out of wrong, but am not heard.”

Where in all this blank mystery of things can God be found? Where even find trace of His government? Earthly kings are in evidence. They have set days on which to meet with and dispense justice to their people. Why has the King of kings none?

“Why does God not fix seasons for judgment?”

The world is overburdened with wrongs—wrongs, injustices, miseries everywhere—yet the Great Being to whom millions are crying night and day abides in darkness and gives

no sign. Surely the burden of the human spirit is the burden of the silence of God.

It is borne tremendously in upon Job that his prayers and appeals, his efforts to get into touch with God are altogether vain. God transcended in glory, is beyond the reach and beyond the ken of man. There is no possibility of access to the Almighty:

“Thou art not a man, as I am,
That we should come together in judgment;
There is no daysman betwixt us,
That might lay his hand upon us both.”

The would-be debater with God has learned his lesson—what if he has learned it fatally well? When he says that God and man cannot “come together in judgment,” is he not guilty of practical atheism? Not that he is denying God’s existence, but—which is the same thing—he is denying the significance of his existence for man. If God and man “cannot come together in judgment” there can be only one reason. It must

be because the meaning God attaches to righteousness is not the meaning man attaches to it. It must be because there is nothing in common between them, no standard of right and wrong acknowledged by both. That is practical atheism. If man is not somehow akin to God, if the human spirit is not—up to the measure of its unfoldment—a key to the divine, of what concern or significance to man is the divine? Job rushes from extreme to extreme. In aspiring to debate with the Almighty he must have come near thinking God altogether like man; now—and this is the greater error—he declares him to be altogether unlike.

Now far from agnosticism being incompatible with religion, a large measure of it is necessary if religion is not to degenerate into narrow and arid dogmatism. All true worship is worship of the “unknown God,” yet the heart’s testimony of all true worshippers must ever be, “unknown, and yet well known.” It was not that Job’s heart failed in that testimony, but that in this

moment of passionate reaction he failed to attend to it. The failure could not, in any case, have been final. His spiritual intuitions were bound speedily to assert themselves, all the more speedily because of the intense religious earnestness of his nature. If we said that Job was saved by his earnestness, carried by means of it safely through the many dangers of his Ordeal, we would be speaking the truth. Passionate earnestness carries with it the power of faith. All things yield to God, and God Himself yields to an earnest man. Watch such a man's career, and it may be you will see miracles. When he ceases to be able to climb, you may see him begin to soar. When he sinks into despair, you may see him snatch hope from the very bosom of despair.

Wonders of this nature, miracles of spiritual alchemy, are frequently to be witnessed in the case of Job; but we need not labour at explanation. The Book itself makes no attempt at explanation. It is a book remarkable for its reticence quite as truly as

for the passionate fulness of its utterance. While true to psychology, it is entirely free from psychological analysis. What comes to the surface is given; on what passes beneath the surface there is silence. The soul of Job is revealed but not dissected.

But what if, at this crisis, the man is restored to hope and effort by the power of a wish? It would not be unbelievable. Wishes are not the impotent things men usually count them. As being the first reaching out, the primal movement of love, they may be said to lie at the root of creation. With respect at least to man's inner world, the contents of his consciousness—and that is all that concerns us here—wishes, for good or evil, are beyond question directly creative.

Job wishes for something or some one to bridge the immeasurable gulf between the divine and the human. Even while believing that God and man cannot come together in judgment, his religious instincts protest against the belief. Passionately, and with his whole heart, he wishes for a mediator

between God and man, a "daysman to lay his hand on us both." Now, however Job was on guard against his own wishes—knowing as he did how they opened the floodgates of self-deception on a man—there was that in this wish against which his guard was ineffective. It belonged to the royal race of wishes; properly speaking, not the wish of an individual, but of the universal human heart speaking through an individual. Job did not understand God, and he somehow felt that, despite His omniscience, God did not understand him. It needed the human to understand the human; it needed a man to know the heart of man. God, remote, inaccessible, infinite in majesty, was not the God Job longed for. He longed for a Being, divine indeed, yet sufficiently akin to himself for community of sympathy to exist. In regard to wishes of this nature may it not be said that man's wishes are God's promises? The spirit of man is a lying spirit if these wishes do not carry in themselves the guarantee of their own fulfilment. And

so it came to pass that this wish lived and bore fruit. In the face of Job's discouragement, it may have ceased for a period to exercise his conscious thought, retiring for refuge into the subliminal region, the secret place of the soul. If so, it retired only, in due season, to return transfigured, victorious, no longer a mere wish, but a triumphant belief:

"Behold, my witness is in heaven,
 And he that voucheth for me is on high.
 My friends scorn me:
 But mine eye poureth out tears unto God,
 That he would maintain the rights of a man with
 God,
 And of a son of man with his neighbour."

Seldom does a great *yea* come to man otherwise than through a *nay*; seldom the radiant light of hope otherwise than as bursting some cloud of despair. Had Job not denied the daysman, it is doubtful whether he would now be affirming the witness. Not that there is equivalence between the affirmation and the denial. The affluence

of spirit makes equivalence impossible. Thought by its very movement gathers riches to itself. The *yea* ever does more than cancel the *nay*; the light illumines a larger space than the cloud obscures. The man who in his hour of gloom denied the umpire, in his hour of illumination more than cancels the denial by affirming the friend, the advocate, one that "voucheth for him on high."

What a great thing this affirmation is for Job! It means nothing less than that a nightmare is lifted from his soul, that the horror of isolation, the insupportable feeling that he is alone in a hostile universe is gone. An evil feeling it was, none the less evil that it has led him to fall mightily back on his own resources, and so discover in himself unbreakable strength. Loneliness has been his tonic; but, if longer administered, it will prove his poison. Already, indeed, there are signs that it is affecting him as poison. Well, therefore, that this monstrous thing, this sense of moral and spiritual isolation—

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his worst torture and his chief danger—is gone. Tear-stained though his eyes still are, there is a gleam of joy in them as he lifts them to the heavens. He has a Friend, one who believes in him, who voucheth for him there. If Job can hold by that thought, he is on the highway to moral and spiritual health.

But can he hold by it? Is it not, as put by him, a self-contradictory thought, certain, when the emotional ecstasy subsides, to fall to pieces of its own contradiction? God to maintain his rights—against God; God, the witness, to stand up for him against God, the accuser; God, the friend, to champion him against God, the enemy! Is not that an utterly forbidden thing, an attempt to think the unthinkable? And what of this utterance?

“Give now a pledge, be surety for me with thyself.”

The God who is accusing him actually asked to be surety for his innocence! Were this merely sublime daring, splendid incon-

sistency, it might evoke our admiration. But is it not contradiction, such contradiction as affronts reason? Is Job not trying to think the unthinkable?

But in attempting to reconcile the contradictions of life are not all men trying to think what is to them unthinkable? Job is doing no more. Glaringly inconsistent as his thought is, what else could be expected? No man reaching out towards new truth, no man mentally and spiritually on the move, can be altogether consistent. Perhaps the difficulty, such as it is, lies more in Job's language than in his thought. Were he an arm-chair theologian, in the leisurely use of his intellect, we might reasonably object to his language. It offends us by its abrupt and unmediated antithesis. But when we bear in mind that Job is a tragically earnest man, struggling for life, or for what to him means more than life, the offence ceases. It is natural that the speech of a man so desperately situated should itself be well-nigh desperate.

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Not, however, these difficulties, but quite other difficulties occur to certain commentators in connection with Job's position. They are troubled to understand how, under this conflict of experience, this clashing of wrath and mercy, Job can continue to be a religious man. One commentator actually thinks that if Job is to retain his religion, it can only be on the assumption that he is in the hands not of one God, but of two. The commentator's words are worth quoting:

"It is impossible for Job to attribute wrath and grace, as he experiences them both, to the same God; he must apportion them to two Gods. Only the assumption that the wrathful God will ultimately be overcome by the gracious God makes it possible for him in spite of his division between God and God, to hold fast to his religion."

Two Gods—dualism as the ultimate truth of things—is it really necessary to attribute such a belief to Job? Had the commentator brought life, rather than logic, to bear on the matter, would he have found it necessary?

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Would he say of a child when it rushes, trembling yet trusting, into an angry father's arms, that it must be thinking of two fathers? Or when, in the words of the hymn, we say of God that:

"Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face,"

would he maintain we must be thinking of two Gods—one to whom to attribute the "frowning providence," another to credit with the "smiling face"? It is certain the commentator would not. Life would save him from the snare of logic. Is Job's case so very different that it calls for a different interpretation? That it is a case of special difficulty cannot be denied. It is not merely that he is unable to reconcile his conflicting experiences of wrath and grace, but that his religious beliefs seem to shut out the possibility of reconciliation. He has been taught to associate divine love exclusively with the smiling face of prosperity. Small wonder, therefore, that his soul staggers under the

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Ordeal, that its vast inrush of new and disconcerting experiences upsets his established ideas of divine goodness, and leaves him a prey to agonising doubt. But there is this to be said. Job is no hunter after theories, nor do facile solutions appeal to him. He accepts the facts of life *simpliciter*, stands up honestly to the contradictions it forces on him. By no sophistry will he evade them, by no glossing multiplicity of words will he hide them from himself. A downright simplicity of thought, a simplicity that will not let itself be entangled in speculation, is characteristic of the man. God is the enemy and yet the friend; God is the accuser and yet the advocate—he finds it so in experience and puts it bluntly so in words. There he apparently leaves it, an unresolved contradiction. But perhaps only apparently. It is significant that the passages in which the contradiction confronts him most vividly are not, as might have been expected, passages in which the deep trouble of his soul is most clamant. On the contrary they are, for the

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most part, hopeful, almost triumphant passages. Does that not lead us to believe that though Job has found no reconciliation, some vision, some prophecy of reconciliation must already be his? What if the reconciliation should be found to come from no outside source, no superimposed theory, but to spring sweetly, naturally from the very heart of the contradiction? What if the very reasons which led him to deny should be beginning to compel him to affirm the love of God? It is what may well be. To argue the matter out is impossible. Those who merely argue about suffering generally end, if they have the courage of their logic, in denying the goodness of God. But those who speak from profound personal experience may be expected to give different testimony. "There is enough suffering in one narrow London lane to show that God does not love man." So in his days of giddy prosperity declared a famous writer. Afterwards, when shame and suffering became that writer's personal portion, he bore far different testimony. "I

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am convinced," he said, "that love of some sort is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering there is in the world." Suffering proof that God cannot love man; suffering proof that God must love man—such change of testimony does not come through the working of the intellect, nor can it be explained by the intellect. But the heart has its own logic, a logic that springs from and grips life with unerring grip. Sorrow always speaks of love; whatever deepens man's nature, be it sorrow or joy, always speaks of love. But in sorrow there is special efficacy. Prosperous people may doubt, shallow people may deny, but men who drink the cup of suffering to the dregs seldom fail to find a jewel at the bottom of the cup. It is the jewel of love. If the commentator's theory is correct, Job has failed to find the jewel. He continues obdurately unable to believe that a loving God can be the author of the suffering of the world, sees indeed no way of accounting for these sufferings other than by assuming that

they come from a second God who is not the friend but the enemy of man. That would mean that the Ordeal has served but to confirm Job in his initial error, the shallow conception of divine love held in common with his friends. But the commentator's theory is assuredly not correct. It is a blind and blindness-creating theory, stultifying the entire wisdom of the Book. It is not claimed that Job has attained unto clearness in the matter. All that is claimed is that the facts of life are gradually ceasing to intimidate the intuitions of his spirit, that his heart is beginning to hint to him that love may be at once the source from which life's contradictions spring and the synthesis in which they find reconciliation. His intellect continues entangled in difficulties, and—sternly honest man that he is—he will not have them lightly dismissed. But while his intellect boggles over them, his heart begins to triumph over them. Job is recovering the wisdom of the child. He is rushing, trembling yet trusting, into his Father's arms.

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He has done what he could. Throughout the long night of his soul he has stood up against, wrestled manfully with, the powers of darkness. But though not defeated, neither is he victorious. It is not in his power to command victory. Not till the morning breaks will the powers of darkness cease their assault. And the morning is about to break. The groanings and wrestlings of the night are about to give place to the radiant peace of the morning.

V: THE DELIVERANCE

THE DELIVERANCE

MANY commentators approach the study of the speech of the Lord in the preconceived belief that it is intended to be the climax and conclusion of the great preceding debate, or at any rate that it must in some sense be directly relevant to that debate. Under the blinding power of that theory they are driven ingeniously to misconstrue the speech—missing what is obvious and finding what does not exist. } (7)

In form the speech professes to be on oracular utterance, the authoritative deliverance of a transcendant umpire; in reality it contains no thoughts save such as emanated from the mind of Job himself. There is that in it which entitles it to be called the speech of the Lord, yet it is also and truly the speech))

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of Job. The divine elevates, but does not displace, the human. God respects human personality. He enters His temple gently lest the shock of His entry should destroy the temple.

The fact that the speech is so little relevant to the debate suggests that we are dealing with a page from real life, the record of an actual spiritual experience. The poet, had the speech been of his invention, could not have had the courage of such irrelevance. But truth is stranger and bolder than fiction.

The Lord is always irrelevant. When He speaks to man it is to change the subject, to meet him not in the plan of his own doubts and fears, but to raise him to a plane where doubts and fears cease to trouble. The speech, alike by what we find in it and by what we fail to find, is stamped with the watermark of truth, the secret signature of God.

Not the climax and conclusion of the debate but—so far as the Book is concerned—the climax and conclusion of Job's spiritual

training is what we get in the speech. The atmosphere of the sick-room is exchanged for the open air of heaven—that is our first broad impression. There is an escape into health—not physical but mental and spiritual health. Narrow fevered thoughts are gone; large, sane, balanced thoughts take their place. Job “sees life steadily and sees it whole.” Lately, he was shut up in himself, brooding on his own dark destiny; now, he is out and abroad, roaming in thought over the vast universe of God. How inscrutable are its workings, how incalculable its forces; what order and beauty, what mystery and majesty are everywhere! Great, past comprehension great must be the God who ordains and governs all, the God who sustains the stars, who controls the storm and the lightning-flash. And this is the Being whom Job, ignorant and impotent mortal, has taken on him to challenge. Himself an infinitesimal part of the vast scheme of things, and knowing nothing of the plan and purpose of the scheme, he has yet dared to criticise and

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blame. He has said in his heart that God does not do right, does not execute justice and judgment; that were he in God's place he could do better. Shame and confusion seize upon Job. He upbraids himself, he mocks at his own mad presumption. That is what is signified by the irony which is so marked a feature of the speech. It is colossal irony, sustained and persistent almost beyond the point of artistry. But nothing less can suffice. Job is lashing himself with the lash of self-criticism, and his lashings are merciless:

|| "I have uttered that which I understood not,
|| Things too wonderful for me which I knew not." ||

Job's rebellion and presumption are gone—
washed away in the bitter waters of self-
reproach. He is a new creature; his attitude
to God and the problems of life has under-
gone complete and sudden change. As to
what brought about this change we have his
own wonderful testimony:

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"I had heard of thee with the hearing of the ear:
But now mine eyes have seen thee.
Wherefore I abhor myself,
And repent in dust and ashes."

Job saw God. To say that he is using the language of poetry is not to belittle the tremendous nature of the claim. Not only may the language of poetry be the language of truth, but it is the only language in which the highest truth can be expressed. Whatever Job meant by his words, he assuredly meant something very great. He was speaking of the supreme experience of his life—an experience so real and so rich in reality as to change the whole current of his being.

To some extent we ought to be able to enter into his experience. Though not mystics, few of us are without glimpses of mystic vision. We belong to the universal freemasonry of spirit; none of the things of the spirit need be hopelessly hid from us. Our attempt to realise what Job meant by seeing God cannot be very successful; but assuredly it need not be called presumptuous.

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Job must be permitted to be his own interpreter. We must study the speech if we would learn what he meant by his mystic experience. Our first impression will probably be that he meant very little. The speech does not appear to contain any distinctively mystic element. It is the speech of a poet rather than a mystic. Doubtless poet and mystic are closely related. No poet can interpret nature unless he possesses the mystic vision. Still, so far as the distinction holds good, the speech of the Lord is to be described as revealing the poet rather than the mystic. It seems nothing more than a magnificent poem on nature, the glory and the mystery of this incalculable universe. The pageant of life is particularly dwelt on. Before Job's mental vision creature after creature passes in triumphant procession, and each as it passes is described with a swiftness and sureness of touch that makes the poem the glory of literature. It is possible to see nothing more in it than that, yet surely there is more. The mystic

element, though nowhere obtruded, is everywhere present. In Job's description of the pageant of life more is at work than the observant eye or the skilful pen. Job sees into, because he gets into the life he describes. The mighty war-horse, glorious in strength, majestic in beauty; the wild ass, roaming the illimitable desert, swift and free as the wind; the strong-winged eagle, scaling the heavens, a fierce majesty of freedom—Job is more than an onlooker at the glorious procession. He is in mystic union with the creatures he describes; he has gripped the springs of their being; he rejoices with them in their joy; their freedom sets his spirit free. Wonderful surely that this man—in his own person a very miracle of misery—should think on these creatures without one touch of envy, not once contrasting their happy lot with his own. Don't call it contentment—it is something greater than contentment. Job has risen above complaints, he has risen above comparisons because he has achieved a new consciousness, the con-

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sciousness of the universal. He "mingles with the universe," loses himself to find himself in the vast ocean of life. He is a nature-mystic.

The Faust of Goethe's drama had also a vision of the "spirit of the earth," and on that account we may think to rank him with Job as a nature-mystic. But some vital difference there must have been between his vision and Job's. What Job saw filled him with sweet humility; what Faust saw left him a prey to despairing pride. We can understand the pride. It came of a rebuff. Faust claimed kinship with the splendour he saw, and the claim was scornfully disowned:

"Man, thou art like the spirit thou conceivest,
Not *me*."

Faust was a student. He sought knowledge because knowledge is power. Not union with, but mastery over nature was his desire. To such a man the Mystery-Power, the "spirit of the earth," must ever appear an alien spirit. His mastery over it does not

lessen his sense of nothingness in its presence. He controls it, yet fears it; he harnesses it into his service, yet feels himself dwarfed into insignificance by the might and majesty of his servant. Hence Faust's sense of rebuke and rebuff; hence also his despairing pride. Man may be humbled by that which exalts him, but scarcely can he be humbled by that which abases him. He is so constituted that he cannot worship unless he feels he may also aspire; cannot even look up without bitterness unless he knows he may also climb up. To worship God man must know himself made in the image of God. Judging by the effect it had on him, Job's vision must have been different from Faust's. Not different in the sense that the disparity between the spirit and himself appeared less to Job than it did to Faust. Job was abundantly conscious of that disparity. But, unlike Faust, he was conscious also of something which, without lessening, tended to sweeten the disparity. What was that something?

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Since his was a mystic experience, we look to the mystics for an answer. If we would find it, we must look beneath the surface. In the form their visions take, and in the religious symbolism they employ, the mystics are as far as possible from being in agreement. Yet in the substance of their message, to whatever age they belong, and whatever symbolism they employ, there is a large measure of agreement—so large, indeed, as to convince us that they cannot be mere explorers of the inane, the dupes of their own imagination. Mere dreamers don't come so near dreaming the same dream; mere visionaries don't all have vision of the same glory. The mystics must be in touch with reality, with something indeed more real than what we call reality. They have no name for that something; they declare it to be beyond all names. Yet if name there must be, they call it *love*. That is the only human word which at all suggests the ineffable reality. With stammering tongue, as if burdened with a message too great for

words, the mystics are at one in declaring that "God is love."

Now love is the unifier. It breaks down all barriers; it annuls all distinctions. There is kinship between all beings that love; God and the humblest of His creatures are one. Had Faust known the "spirit of the earth" as love, his proud heart would have suffered no rebuff. He would have rejoiced in the vast splendour of the spirit, for he would have felt that he had interest in, nay, somehow shared in that splendour. And thus, as beholding his littleness in the mirror of his greatness, the vision, even while humbling, would have exalted him. That is the mystic paradox, source of the broken yet exultant heart of the saints.

The fact that the word *love*, the key-word of mysticism, does not occur in the speech of the Lord, need give rise to no doubt as to the nature of Job's vision. The reality for which the word stands pervades the speech as an atmosphere. The universe speaks something infinitely good and comforting

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to the soul of Job. It speaks of a free and uncovenanted beneficence, a prodigality of bounty, careless yet infinitely minute in its care. A vast purpose of good is present everywhere; baffling, awe-inspiring, in the mystery of its vastness. If Job does not call it love, may it not be because it is not love as he aforetime had understood the word? He had thought of love as selective and preferential in its activities, as flowing through, and confined by the channels of justice and judgment, bestowed on those who merited it, and withheld from those who did not. The vision opens his mind to something quite different. It is exceedingly significant that not a word is said in the speech as to God dealing with men according to their deserts. The moral idea is practically ignored. Divine love is thought of as free and unfettered by human deserts, a flood of beneficence too vast to be curbed and contained in its flow by the channels of justice and judgment. All channels are used by it; it pours itself on all creatures;

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it is universal and impartial as the sun which shines on the good and the evil alike. A new conception this to the narrow, merit-and-demerit-haunted Job—so divinely great in its newness that he does not call it love at all. But his heart knows the secret his timid tongue cannot utter. It *is* love, such love as befits the infinite heart of God. Its purposes reach out everywhere into the unknown, beyond man and beyond the interests of man. The Almighty

“Causeth it to rain in a land where no man is,
On the wilderness where there is no man;
To satisfy the waste and desert ground,
And to cause the tender grass to spring forth.”

Creation lives in the bosom of infinite love. The good providence of God, like the blue heavens, is over all. Now that Job's spiritual eyes are open, now that his heart is in a state of illumination, that is what he sees. If the vision has dazzled him, if its overpowering splendour has for the time obscured the moral idea, we need not wonder. It

often happens that one must sacrifice truth in healthy reaction against error. The moral problem, not in broad and inspiring, but in narrow, legal form, has been too much with Job. Human merit and demerit have bulked too largely in his thought, obscuring for him the free beneficence of Heaven. It is good that, for a time, he should escape all narrowness, even the noble narrowness of the moral law, that he should bathe his vexed and wearied spirit in the healing waters of free, uncovenanted love. He will return from this divine holiday of spirit not into lawlessness, but into a grander, more inspiring conception of law. The moral idea, shed of its tight-fitting garment of legality, will shine forth in its majesty and naked splendour.

But this conception of divine love as cosmic energy, impartial in its outflow—is it not a purely pantheistic conception, and does it not carry with it the denial of divine personality? The question, we may be sure, did not occur to Job; and it need not trouble

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us. Perhaps as a question it possesses more philosophic interest than practical importance. Life is wider and wiser than reason. Life overleaps difficulties which reason cannot remove. When we relate ourselves to God with part of our being—as thinkers—He may seem impersonal; when we relate ourselves to Him with our whole being—as worshippers—He invariably beams upon us as personal. If then God is impersonal, there is no resisting the conclusion—paradoxical though it be—that we can establish personal relations with the impersonal. Religious experience does more than prove the possibility of such relations; it proves that when man finds God such relations invariably come into being. Into Job's search for God the sustained passion of his being entered; it is certain that the God he found was a personal God.

We may say that a vision of the infinite width of divine love drives a man out of his narrowness; with equal truth we may say that, until he is driven out of his narrowness,

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the vision cannot be his. In any case, Job's vision means for him a new birth of spirit. He is purged of religious egoism; he is delivered from the "heresy of separateness"—that heresy of the heart, fruitful cause of his spiritual anguish. In presence of the divine vision questions, complaints, petitions cease. Self and the interests which attach to self sink out of account. The me element which bulked so largely in his relations with God is gone. Not "God loves me" but "God is love" is the thought that prevails. Job is a new creature, purged, elevated, enlarged. The infinite width of divine love, the infinite width of divine purpose steady, strengthen, and expand his soul. He is flooded with the thought of God; the thought that brings peace, that itself is peace to all who possess it. And with this change every thought of his heart is changed. He is a free man now, and freedom thinks sweet thoughts. Once bitterly, rebelliously conscious of his nothingness, he is now sweetly, savingly conscious; glad to know himself as clay in the

hands of the Potter, since he loves and trusts the Potter.

At last Job's training—so far as the Book reveals it—is complete. At last the question of the Ordeal, “Doth Job serve God for nought?” is settled, and settled to Satan's discomfiture. Until now all Job could have answered was: “Yes, I do serve God for nought. I get no justice from Him, and no favour. But though He treats me badly, I won't abandon the service,

“I will cling to mine integrity so long as I live.”

But if it is a noble thing on the part of Job to serve God for nought, is it not an unfair thing on the part of God to permit such service? If Job is willing to work for nothing, ought God to be willing to let him work? That is the question which throughout his Ordeal tortured Job. All his denials that God dealt with him according to his deserts carried with them the question, “Why does He not?” Indignantly and in vast bewilderment he flung the question at

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the heavens, demanding an answer. While he served in that spirit could his service be called free and disinterested? He received no wages, indeed, but grumbled because he received none. Did that not reveal the spirit of the hireling? And was it any better in his days of prosperity? Not that he then consciously served as a hireling. Experience had not interpreted him to himself. He could not discover that he worked for wages till the wages ceased. Soon as they ceased he began to complain, showing that all along, unknown to himself, the spirit of the hireling had been his. But life's tests are creative tests. The Ordeal has brought into evidence by bringing into being. It has proved Job's virtue to be disinterested by actually making it so. No longer does he complain of injustice; no longer demand that accounts between God and himself should be squared. There are no accounts to be squared. Self and the interests attaching to self are gone, swallowed up in the consciousness of the all-embracing love of God. At last, therefore,

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Job is in a position to give the lie to Satan.
Consciously, willingly, without question and
without complaint he serves God for nought.

“The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.”

The saying applies to his spiritual quite as much as to his material welfare. The untutored faith of his early days depended on the continuance of prosperity. Reverse of fortune cast him into doubt. His faith was an unstable thing, a pyramid standing on its apex. Now it is broad-based on the infinite love of God. Nothing can shake it or destroy. Job is free of the universe.

A great change this; but the greatness of the change does not render it the less credible. On the contrary, in a man's spiritual condition great changes are more likely to occur than small ones. Petty reforms, such as he consciously imposes on himself, occur but seldom and count for little; whereas, when the spiritual centre of gravity changes, all other changes follow. Job is a new creature.

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His spiritual centre of gravity has shifted. His thoughts, once egocentric, are now theocentric. A wonder, indeed, but a wonder that can often be witnessed in actual life; a miracle, indeed, but such a miracle as psychology permits of. "It is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes."

"Ask and ye shall receive"—better than what ye ask. So it proves with Job. His desires are sublimated, that they may be fulfilled. He desired to see God that he might debate with Him. He sees, and the desire for debate passes into the passion for worship. The problem of his destiny ceases to be a problem, and becomes a mystery through which shines the splendour of love.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of uses. Discover what service a thing renders, and you have discovered why it finds a place in the universe. Does not, then, the problem of suffering find its concrete solution in the person of Job? If it has ennobled him, does it not justify itself? Satan duped by his own activities; Satan trying to prove that

Job's virtue is merely enlightened selfishness, thereby bringing it about that Job is purged of every taint of selfishness—that, in its most direct line of thought, is the teaching of the Book. Though not didactic on purpose, the Book is thus splendidly didactic. We may sum up its teaching in the words of Paul; they are words to the truth of which the Book bears massive testimony:

“Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.”

Good has come out of evil. But not by way of natural and necessary sequence has it come; here, as always, by way of miracle and glad surprise. Satan has accomplished nothing for God, but God has accomplished much through Satan.

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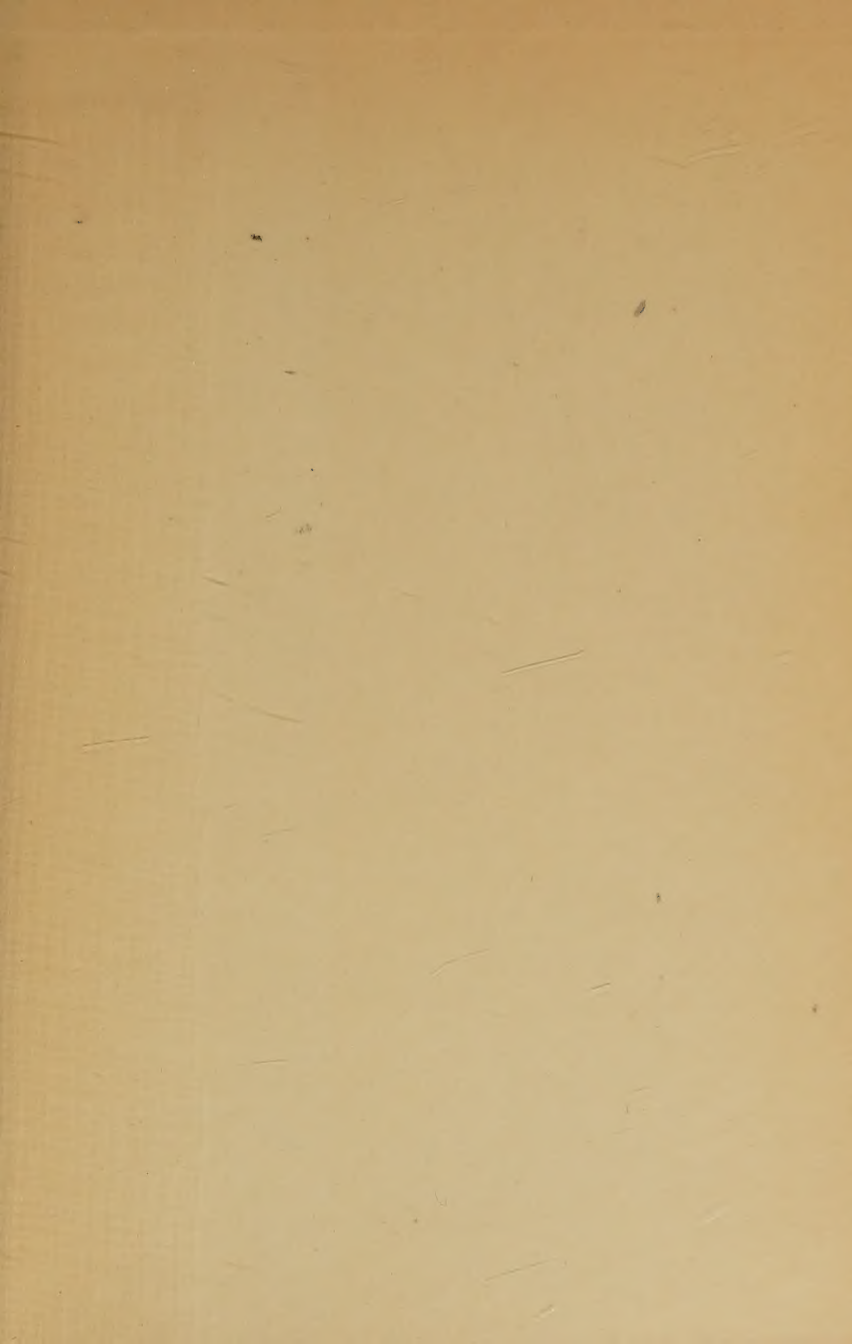
Job, moral hero, religious
egoist and mystic

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